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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2997
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1085
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000870

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH PRESIDENT GUL SEEKS TO REASSURE
AZERBAIAJAN AFTER YEREVAN TRIP

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Turkish President Gul's September 10 visit to Baku probably focused on reassuring the GOAJ and the general public that Gul's attendance at a soccer match in Yerevan would not degrade Turkey's "special relationship" with Azerbaijan. The GOAJ almost certainly is nervous about a thawing trend in Turkish-Armenian relations because this diminishes Baku's leverage with Yerevan by being able to highlight Armenia's geopolitical isolation, but GOAJ officials are not sharing their jitters with us. The general Azerbaijani public has not hid its discomfort with Gul's trip to Yerevan, however. GOAJ officials and the general public remain critical of Ankara's Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Program, arguing that it is vague and divorced from the current political realities on the ground. End Summary.

Baku,s Jitters about Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement

¶2. (C) The immediate political context of Gul's September 10 visit to Baku is the Azerbaijani public,s questioning of Gul's willingness to attend the September 6 soccer match in Yerevan. Azerbaijanis are quick to emphasize the "special relationship" between Azerbaijanis and Turks, and they reflexively look to Ankara as a key regional partner--in terms of energy and infrastructure projects and a loyal backer of Azerbaijan,s position on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). Our contacts have told us a wave of nervousness and fear rippled through the general public when Gul announced his decision to travel to Yerevan. The underlying issue for Azerbaijanis was a sense that Turkey might abandon or betray Azerbaijan, especially on the central issue of NK.

¶3. (C) Political commentator Hikmet Hadjizade said the GOAJ probably was keen to have Gul visit Baku to calm public jitters--alongside some level of private nervousness as well--that Ankara was contemplating "selling out" Baku for warmer relations with Armenia. Hadjizade emphasized that while Presidents Aliyev and Gul probably also discussed energy and the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Program, the main aim of the trip was to assure the GOAJ and the general public that Turkey's pursuit of more normalized relations with Armenia would not necessitate a change in Turkey,s "special" relationship with Azerbaijan.

¶4. (C) GOAJ officials share the general public's jitters; some, however, have been reluctant to show us this face. When asked about the significance of Gul's trip to Yerevan, MFA Security Affairs Department Chief Galib Israfilov calmly told Embassy officers the event was part of a much broader,

ongoing attempt by both states to normalize ties. (NOTE: Israfilov reports directly to Deputy Foreign Minister Azimov, who handles the MFA's NK negotiations.) Israfilov noted other attempts by Turkey and Armenia to repair ties, including cultural cooperation in rebuilding Armenian churches in eastern Turkey. Despite Israfilov's calm, other senior GOAJ officials express additional concern about the long-term impact of a potential Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. Presidential Administration Political Analysis Chief Elnur Aslanov, expressing doubts about the effectiveness of President Gul's visit, told embassy officers last week that Turkey and Armenia "could not reconcile without settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict." Even in the short-term, any appearance of Ankara and Yerevan moving to normalize their bilateral relationship undercuts a key point of Azerbaijan's strategy toward NK: highlighting Armenia's geopolitical isolation in the hopes of extracting concessions from Yerevan.

Limited Interest in Turkey,s Caucasus Initiative

15. (C) GOAJ officials consistently signal to the Embassy that Azerbaijan considers Ankara's Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Program as poorly-defined and divorced from regional political realities, namely Georgian-Russian and Azerbaijani-Armenian tensions. In a meeting with Special Envoy C. Boyden Gray, President Aliyev said the proposal is "not serious or realistic." Aslanov described the proposal as "foggy," noting that Baku and Yerevan are not ready to sit down together with regional partners to discuss sensitive issues. Presidential Administration Director Ali Hasanov

later told the Ambassador that Azerbaijan would not agree to participate in the program as long as the United States is excluded (septel). Israfilov also threw cold water on the proposal, while noting the need for Azerbaijan to maintain a publicly upbeat line.

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